

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.

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THE ART OF HISTORIC DETECTION

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Unraveling the mysteries of historic construction practices, especially in a building as old as the 179-year old Casa de Bandini, which underwent major renovations, requires above all else a commitment to the art of detection.

“There is nothing like first-hand evidence,” the legendary fictional English detective, Sherlock Holmes, once quipped. The problem is finding the evidence—in this case, remnants of historic fabric dating back to the building’s use as the Cosmopolitan Hotel or even earlier when it was the residence of Juan Bandini.

Over the past three weeks, State Parks’ on-site inspection team, headed by archaeologist Larry Felton and engineer Robert Robinson, began removing sample sections of the exterior stucco façade on the second story overlooking the rear courtyard.

The cement stucco dates back to the 1930 renovation undertaken by Cave Coutts Jr. It is layered over chicken wire and tar paper, which, in turn, covers the mill sawn redwood clapboard installed by Albert Seeley as siding in 1869 for his hotel.



The boards are approximately six inches in height with a narrow top or lip, which widens toward the base. The base of the adjoining board overlaps or covers about 1 1/2 inches of the other board’s lip. The heavy residue of lead-base paint suggests that the siding was originally reddish brown.

Clapboard siding helped to economize on nail usage—in this case, the lip and base of the adjoining boards were held in place with a single nail. Seeley’s

work crews used cut nails with an almost square top. The redwood siding on the 1872-1874 addition on the eastern extremity of the veranda is grooved drop siding, not clapboard siding.

Samples of the hotel’s original redwood door and window trim have also been uncovered, along with imprints of the original window sills. The sills extend further out than the existing sills installed in 1930.

